THE OGDEN STANDARD

THE FEUD MAN AND THE FEUD WOMAN

AN Interview with "Cap" Hatfield in His Mountain Eyrie and an Appreciation of His Helpmeet. Who Has Shared Stolidly His Perils and Hardships, a Salient Type of the "Mountain Woman"

ELLISON HATFIELD.

CHARLES GILLISPIE.

IF you chance to be travelling through Virginia on a local train running down from Columbus to Norfolk you will strike a little corner in the mountains where three States come together. The brakeman will point it out to you and name the States—Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky. A moment later he will call the station Panther, using his most official voice, although Panther is not much of a town—a few wooden houses built half up the hillside, the railroad at the bottom and hills crowding all around.

The hills are so close it is impossible to get a view of the sky from the car window. One must get out on the station platform, tip one's head back and look straight up. There is the sky, uninteresting enough. Off at one end of the platform you will find the figure of a man sitting on a horse. Raw boned, both of them lean, and long and lank. The horse looks half starved and altogether ugly; the man, all of that, is at the same time tired and forlorn.

The station agent, if he has time in the excitement of the train's arrival, will answer your query with a laconic "Cap Hatfield; watch out for him!"

Any one not knowing who Cap Hatfield is would laugh at the idea of watching out for this half-fed man. He wears a blue homespun shirt, old fashioned pull boots that reach to the knee and across his lap lies a musket of '63. He might be a civil war figure left behind by the armies that swept Virginia from the mountains to the sea. But he is far from that. The barrel of his gun is tied to the butt with pieces of dirty twine, yet the gun can shoot, and it has killed men.

Cap Hatfield is the last remnant of the Hatfield-McCoy feud, which was in its turn one of the last of those savage family wars which waged back and forth across the border line between the three States—Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky.

The Hatfield-McCoy feud is at an end because the McCoys are all dead, except one who ran away to Texas and has not been heard from since. In the meantime Cap Hatfield would take anything he really wanted, from a chew of tobacco to a ton of steel rail. He would kill any one who got in his way as easily as he would shoot a turkey, and he is the most notorious moonshiner among the mountain whites. Altogether he is about as lawless as a rattlesnake in August, which in those mountains is saying a good deal.

If you want to meet Cap Hatfield there is just one man to introduce you; if you want to call at his mountain home there is just one man to take you there. He is James Baldwin, one time police captain, now railroad detective, of Roanoke, Va. Captain Baldwin expects to die with his boots on; the when and where has no particular interest for him. You might go with him as we went in the last warm days of October—by horses and over mountain roads. And it is worth while just to see these two fighters together, both so clearly the spirit of feudal days, when all men lived to fight.

Cap Hatfield is afraid of the tall, white haired man from Roanoke. Baldwin has rare guns and a clear head. He is the only man who ever caught the mountaineer and carried him in to jail. Cap Hatfield admires a man who can do that, and so far as it is in him to be friends with any one he is friends with this man of the law.

There are both State and government warrants out for Cap Hatfield's arrest and many a deputy in the United States service has tried to get a hand on him. Some years ago he moved from Pike county, Kentucky, where he was born and raised, and where he spent his time killing McCoys and distilling whiskey contrary to the law. It was a bit dangerous to live at Pikeville under the eyes of the judges and the eaves of the county jail. So he moved himself, his "hoss," his wife and his children a few miles east into Buchanan county, Virginia, where the hills are almost unpeopled and the trail is hard to find. He had been over there many a time when the law of Kentucky was after him, but this time he went to stay. He built his cabin on the top of a mountain which is heavily wooded and thick with undergrowth.

The mountaineer had plenty of children, nine of them in all, but some died; Cap scarcely knows how many there are alive now. Even so, there are enough of them to guard that hill and keep busybodies away. There is just one trail up the mountains, in the first place, and a stranger may try that way if he dares. Ping! will come the first bullet snapping through the trees. The second will come nearer, and the third, if any one is foolish enough to pursue the journey, will come straight home. There will be no other sign of humans; the Hatfields always fight under cover. They might shoot you full of holes, and you would have nothing to prove it was they. If you go with Captain Baldwin you put your faith in him. The revolver in your hip pocket might better be candy or chewing gum for the children.

Up the Mountain Trail.

Captain Baldwin, of Roanoke, and Cap Hatfield, of Buchanan county, have an agreement of peace. Until within a few years the Hatfields were always playing jokes on the railroad, pulling up ties or taking the stove from some station house along the way. Sometimes they needed the stove, but often they were merely out for a good time—that was their moonshine idea of fun. Captain Baldwin followed their trail until even the "old man" got nervous. So it happened that when he was last in jail for some small offence he submitted to a peace agreement. He promised not to play with railroad property nor to make trouble in his corner of the world. And the man from Roanoke, who held some warrants in reserve with the threat of Kentucky justice behind them all, agreed not to arrest the "old man." This contract has held for six years or more, and when Captain Baldwin goes to visit the Hatfields nowadays it is to give a word of warning or a bit of advice, as that may fall due.

In the last warm days of October the mountains are beautiful. Every roadway and open space is covered with a thick bed of yellow leaves, the pines stand in patches of dark green against the mountain sides and the view of the valleys is softened with blue haze. The horses climb up narrow trails regardless of the tree branches that slap in your face. It is a hard ride of some twenty odd miles from the railroad; nature is gracious and inviting, but after the first turn from the road the trail does not assist the traveller upon his way.

We, who had never made the journey, were at first garrulous; we laughed and made foolish puns. But as the mountains closed around us, and we came near to the firing line, the stillness made itself felt above our din. Captain Baldwin fell into the habit of his work and was quiet, pointing out an occasional bird as it flew up on our passing. Once it was a buzzard under our very noses, and again it was a wild turkey far off. The trail dwindled away until it was just a faint break in the trees; we climbed over rocks and under low tree branches. We were scratched and mauled and our horses were panting when we came to the last turn upward, and Captain Baldwin said:—"Here we are."

No one wanted to talk after that, although Captain Baldwin had laughed at the idea of danger, telling us there was nothing to fear. We were, perhaps, not afraid, but the idea of a bullet whizzing through the underbrush was not reassuring. And who could tell what mistake of judgment the "brats," as Captain Hatfield calls them, might make? They might see us and not our leader; they might aim high and hit low; there were a dozen mights that made us pull our necks down into our collars and sit perfectly still as we rode. It is a paralyzing thought that you are riding under the gun eye of the enemy, even though the enemy be nothing more than three half grown boys.

Long before we came out into the open we could hear the yapping of dogs, and once the scuffle of leaves near at hand in the undergrowth frightened at least one of us dumb. Captain Baldwin rode on, silent and unmindful, although he knew the "brats" were near and watching every step of our way. When we rode into the clearing near the cabin there they stood armed and ready. And Cap Hatfield, leaning against the cabin, a motionless, lazy figure, held his old fashioned flintlock across one arm ready for work if trouble came.

Our host did not greet us and we got down from our horses as best we could—fell off, one of us did, from sheer numbness and fear. When Captain Baldwin motioned to one of the boys to take our bridles he did it hesitatingly, not daring to disobey.

Smiling, Captain Baldwin went forward with a cheerful "How do you do?"

"Howdy?" answered the mountaineer, staring at us.

The captain nodded our way carelessly. "Women folks home?" he asked. "They came to make a call."

Our host neither moved nor turned an eye, but in a thin mountain voice called, "Maw!"

Immediately the cabin door opened and a white frightened face appeared. Smiling and with as much friendliness as we could muster we said, "How do you do?"

The woman looked anxiously toward her old man.

"It's all right. We didn't come to make trouble. These folks want to talk to you." And Captain Baldwin again nodded his head toward us.

We stepped forward, expecting to go in with her, but she thrust her arms akimbo, thereby blocking the doorway, while her eyes devoured us. Ar.d such eyes! Gray and fairly cold with suspicion, but now shining almost black as her curiosity got the better of her.

"Could we have a drink?" I asked by way of awakening her, although she seemed scarcely to hear as she stared. Pointing with one bony hand to a pail that stood on a bench at the door, and remaining silent and immovable, she drank us in.

We drained the cup, not because we were thirsty, but to give her time. Then after a long silence I said, "It's quite a journey up here."

"Come fer?" she asked, still not moving.

"From the station," I replied with my most friendly smile. "Do you go down often?"

She shook her head, her eyes ranging from my necktie to belt buckle and shoes. It was difficult, but I urged gently:—"I suppose you go down in the summer, when it's warm?"

"Nope," she answered, and as her face shadowed I could see it was not a happy story she had to tell. Still I did not suspect how hard it was, asking unthinkingly:—"Weren't you there this summer?"

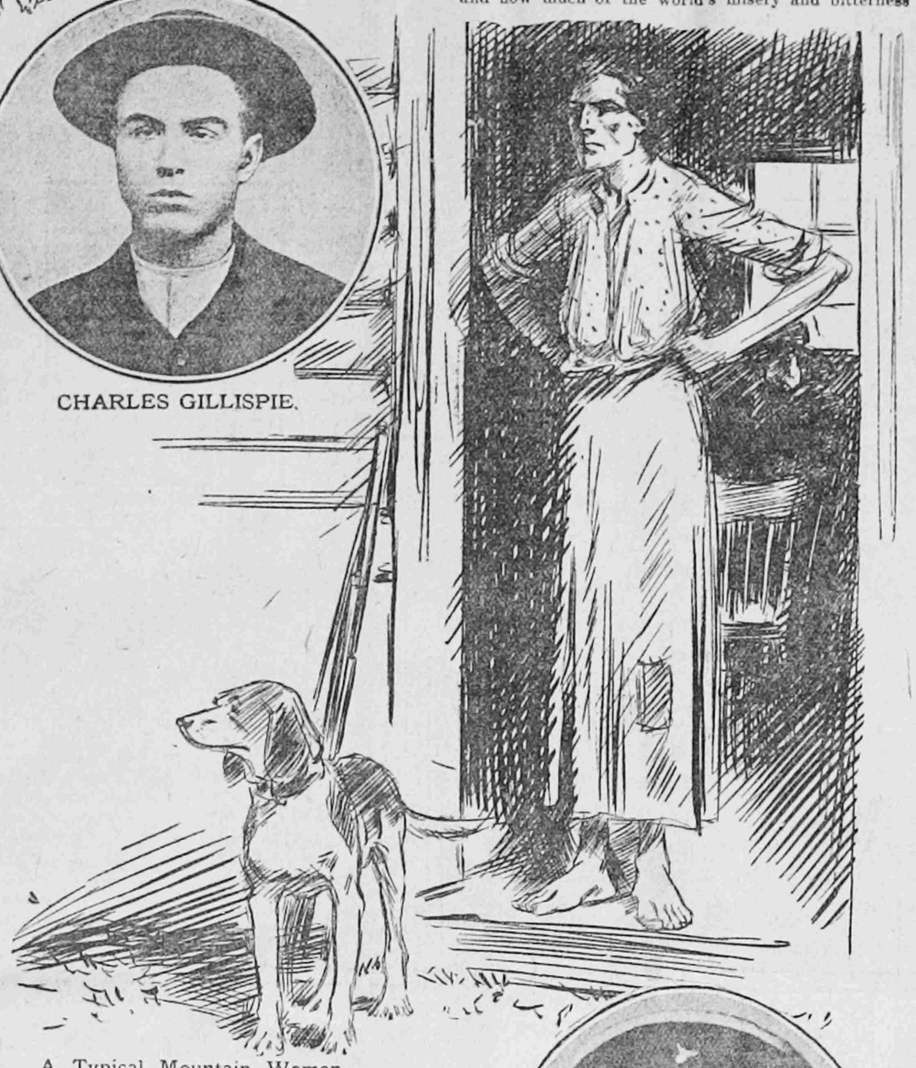
"Ain't been thur in four year," she sighed. "Ain't seen no folks seppin' brats here."

It seemed almost impossible.

"But aren't you lonely?" we protested.

And having said it we were sorry, for a look of pain came over her face and her eyes sought the trail sharply. There are some things that are never spoken, yet the trouble of years can dissolve into a feeling and pass between people until each person understands. It was so in this case—the suffering of her lonely, hunted life was as keen to me as if she had told it word for word. We each looked toward the trail, and I for the first time saw the opening in the trees far below where the trail was revealed. How many times her eyes had looked toward that trail I could but partly guess. How many times she had watched for enemies and seen her boys coming home hurt from a fight! How many times her old man had gone that way and she had waited, wondering if he would ever come back! How many times her eyes had followed the trail, longing to go out into the world, and how much of the world's misery and bitterness must have dragged up that way to lodge at her door.

She drew her breath with a hard, quick sound—and we knew. She had scarcely spoken a word, and yet had told her story as she had not words to tell it. I turned toward her, eager to speak my sympathy, but her drawn, white face made that impossible. She was wringing her hands nervously in her apron. For a moment she wavered, then stepped back from the door with a quick "Min?"



A Typical Mountain Woman.

"CAP" HATFIELD.

In the One Room Cabin.

We went into a one room log cabin without windows, which means without light or air. At one side the chimney sent a smudgy smoke into the room. The beds on the other side were double decker berths filled with corn husk ticks. There was a pine board table, with benches on each side, and at the far end of the room stood a cupboard filled with dirty tins, a cracked plate or two, some corn meal and a bag of salt. Near the fire hung some sides of pork that had been recently smoked. The cupboard was by far the most important piece of furniture in the room, since it held the eating and cooking paraphernalia for the household. Flour and water corn bread made up their bill of fare. When the old man went into town with a jug of whiskey and traded it for tobacco he sometimes opened his heart and purse for coffee. Once in a great while he came home with an orange which he had bought as a curiosity, but they usually kept it to look at until it was dried beyond eating.

We sat down on the benches and pretended to feel at home, although the dogs and chickens fairly ate us up. The woman shooed roughly. "I'm afeared it ain't what yer used to here," she said.

"Oh, it's great fun," we answered, trying to believe it ourselves.

"'Tain't like what you come from, I reckon?" she questioned wistfully.

"Well, you see, we live in the town," apologized, and then, to change the subject, "Do the children go to school?"

She folded her arms and I saw that had hurt her, although she answered bravely enough, "Gawd, no; they ain't no eddication worth caountin up here. I reckon you ben eddicated?"

"I've been to school," I admitted.

"Kin you write good?" she asked eagerly. Then, as I nodded my head, "I wanted my girls to hev eddication, but I cayn't git it nohow. There a growin' up here like the hawgs. There ain't nothin' I kin do. Seems livin' ain't no partikler fun," she added, shaking her head.

"You must have had a hard time," I said, as kindly as possible.

"There's be'n trouble a-plenty," she answered, with a hard note in her voice. "There's allus ben trouble with him. Men folks is hard to get on with."

"Weren't you afraid, all alone so much?" for it was plain there had been no chivalry in her life.

She held her head high. "Law, no. Ain't nothin' to be afearin'; ef folks dies they dies, and that's all there is on it. I lost plenty of folks, too, with all this trouble of ourn, an' ef they goes, why they goes; you can't help it nohow."

And with this piece of philosophy she settled back into a stolid silence which gave one again the impression of years spent waiting. It may have been those years of waiting and watching, and never knowing, which gave to the mountain women a courage their men have not. The men fight from cover and run, they never choose to meet the enemy face to face. But the women have braved any danger to help their "folks." In the history of the Hatfield-McCoy feud there are plenty of women who went to fight and went unarmed.

Early in the history of the feud there appears the mother of Randolph McCoy, thirteen years old, who was captured by the Hatfields. The boy was held a prisoner in a lonely cabin, and, you may believe, well guarded. But his mother went in the middle of the night, tramping for miles over the mountains to reach her boy. On her knees she begged Bad Anse Hatfield, whose name was well earned, to kill her and spare the boy. It rather spoils the story of the feuds to know that he literally kicked her out of the cabin door. On another occasion some brave McCoy women notified their clansmen that trouble was ahead. And as a result the trouble came to them, for the Hatfields rode up to their cabin in the night, killed their men, dragged them out of doors and horsewhipped them until their ribs were broken.

And another time when the cabin of "Old Rand'l" McCoy was surrounded by the enemy in the night, it was Mrs. McCoy who opened the cabin door and walked out into the mob to reach her girls who had been sleeping in a cabin near at hand. One of the Hatfields, not thinking her worth shooting, struck her with the butt of his gun. She fell to the ground, badly hurt, but dragged herself along on hands and knees, still bent on saving her children, and Cap Hatfield, or one of his tribe, kicked her and killed her.

That was all right to their minds, for what use was a woman but to do as a man told her? In the Hargis-Cockrill feud there was a woman named Mrs. George Johnson. Mrs. Johnson, without a gun or any killing of the enemy on her part, fought through the years while her uncle, brother and son were shot and her husband was driven into exile. Her brother was afraid to appear in the street because he knew assassins were following him. And for years he walked with his sister between him and the possible enemy. Once when he was going to the railway station a sister walked on each side of him and he carried his baby in his arms. If murder had been attempted one other than himself must have been sacrificed.

It never seemed to occur to the men that there was anything unmanly in that sort of thing. Cap Hatfield would treat his woman as well as he would treat his horse and consider himself kind enough in so doing. His woman is undoubtedly braver than he. She may not shoot as straight, but she has fought and she does not fear the open.

"JONCE" HATFIELD.

"You don't kill McCoys any 'more?" I was bold enough to ask the old man as he sat on a bench at the cabin door.

He grinned sheepishly. "Nope."

"Why not?" I urged, to start him on his story.

He took a corncob pipe from his mouth to answer. "Ain't none around yere."

"Killed them all off?"

"Yep."

His Man Killing Record.

"Whom are you going to kill now, just for fun?" This was a rather unnecessary question, but he took it good naturedly.

FRENCH ELLIS.

"No 'un, I reckon. Too old."

He fumbled his musket, and we looked at it—a great, old fashioned thing, which has killed more than one man. He would not let it out of his hands, even when he turned it over and pulled it around. It was tied with innumerable bits of string and a piece of rusty wire held the trigger in place. It was a breech-loader, with a ramrod, and leading us into the house he showed us his bullet mould, his ladle and a piece of lead pipe, certainly not come by honestly, from which his bullets were made. It was all so old fashioned it ceased to seem dangerous and we asked anxiously:—

"Have you killed any one with this?"

He nodded his head, referring to it as though it were a matter of history, which, in truth, it is. "T'other side of Tug River there wus three," was a monotonous drawl.

He hesitated and we waited breathless while pride got the better of his judgment and he went on:—"Up to ole Rand'ls there wus a couple. Up in t' hills th'r," with a nod over his shoulder. "One o' them Sheriff fellers come along—an ole man down yonder"—pointing—"and a couple o' more maybe"—the last as though a man or two were not worth counting.

But it was not all done with a musket of '63. "Cap" Hatfield has eight dead men's scalps at his belt and he will show you with pride his shooting irons. Two revolvers of recent pattern he reserves for his own use. His oldest boy, dragged to the front, can produce an older pair, guns that have seen good service. And each child, in turn, is armed according to his age. They are trained to firearms from the cradle and to look upon revolvers as a necessity of life.

"Cap" Hatfield is as childlike about some things as any of his children. He will go to the railway station and sit for hours watching the trains come and go with their freight of humans from the outside world. He was just as much interested in us, and we were as queer to him as he and his family could possibly have been to us. He showed us his knives, made out of butcher knives, sharpened on both edges and worn with use until their original purpose is no longer apparent. The women have no knives for cooking, but all the children have knives for killing men, and when some meat is needed they borrow a man killer to carve the bacon.

There was little enough to show, but "Cap" Hatfield did the honors with pride. "Maw, where's thet there collar?" he questioned when his tools had been carefully handled and praised.

"Maw" did not know, but the children scrambled under the bed, all of the little ones helping to bring the collar to view. It was a gaudy affair, the kind few cowboys, even in the good old days, have worn. But Jonce Hatfield, "Cap's" brother, went to Colorado once in 1885, and when he came home a couple of years later he brought a complete cowboy outfit, such as they sell in stores. His hat had silver stars embroidered on the brim. His coat was leather, fringed at the seams and with embroidered collars and cuffs done in silver and scarlet. He was as proud of that outfit as a Hatfield girl could have been with a silk dress.

All of the Hatfield men fell victim to its charm. For once in their lives they were indiscreet; they went to the nearest photographer in a body, and one by one they put on the hat and coat, armed themselves with revolvers after the true cowboy fashion, and had their pictures taken. Needless to say, they had never had their pictures taken before and never would again.

The coat and hat are gone, worn out by the handling of admirers, but the collar remains the treasured possession of the one leader who lives to wage war upon the world. Jonce Hatfield, now dead, was the ugliest one of Devil Anse Hatfield's children. He fell in love with Rose Ann McCoy and carried her off to his father's house. Two years later he drove her away by his brutality, and she went home carrying her baby boy with her. When the boy was nine years old a band of Hatfields, led by Jonce, made a raid on the cabin one night. They battered down the door of the cabin where the boy was sleeping with the girls of the family. Alfara McCoy, the eldest girl, stood in the doorway to protect the others and was shot. Ellison Hatfield was afterward captured, tried and hanged for the murder. Jonce Hatfield, breaking into the room over the girl's dead body, saw the figure of some one lying in bed covered with blankets. He fired and almost killed his own boy, an incident which was considered a great joke among the Hatfields.

This was the cabin of Randolph McCoy, one of the originators of the feud. It all came about over two "hawgs," as the mountaineers would call them. Randolph McCoy and Floyd Hatfield claimed the same two razorbacks, and when Floyd Hatfield brought suit to recover them he had the case called before Justice Matthew Hatfield. The settlement, naturally in favor of the Hatfields, caused bad blood, and at the next county election, when there was too much moonshine whiskey, the Hatfields and McCoys got together in their first real fight. After that intermittently for years the war was raged. They made raids on houses at midnight, killing men, women and children; they set fire to cabins and lay in ambush to shoot and kill. It was barbaric warfare, such as might have prevailed a century before. The mountaineers are at least a hundred years behind the times and strangers to the present ways and doings of the world.

Cap Hatfield's eldest girl took the red neck ribbon I handed her and clutched it to her breast with a savage joy in her eyes. She was like a wild animal. She did not seem grateful or to have any thought of the gift part of it. She had the ribbon and she hung on to it as if we would take it away from her. Indeed, we were the only ones who did not try to snatch it. All of the family, even her father, wanted it and held out greedy hands. The boys chewed the gum we had given them and said nothing, but looked volumes. The little girls screamed and clawed until their father kicked at them as he had just kicked the dogs. He would undoubtedly have kicked them into the corner as unthinkingly, but they were spry midgets and got out of the way.

"DEVIL ANSE" HATFIELD.

Back to the Outside World.

We did not choose a long call on the Hatfields. There were a few words of warning delivered on the side between the two captains, we took a last look toward the trail, where we saw a wonderful view, and climbed on our horses to get under way for the journey down. Cap Hatfield walked beside us as far as the timber and the boys ran all the way to the trail at the foot of the hill. Each member of the family left us regretfully, devoured by curiosity concerning us and looking at us with big eyes as long as we were in sight.

"Queerer to them than they are to us," I said as we turned into the trail.

The Captain from Roanoke shook his head and laughed. But, after all, that is true, for they in their minds and hearts are still in the pioneer period. Our pioneer ancestors lived in fortified cabins and fought men. There was no bad blood with them; they fought to protect themselves and their law. The Hatfields protect themselves against law and fight for pioneer rights which other Americans have long since foregone.